

Testimony of Commissioner Cynthia F. Figueroa  
City of Philadelphia Department of Human Services  
Resolution No. 180707  
February 12, 2019

Good morning, I am Cynthia F. Figueroa, Commissioner of the City of Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS). Thank you to Councilmember David Oh and Chairwoman Cindy Bass, and the entire Committee on Public Health and Human Services for the opportunity to present testimony today. With me, today, is Kim Ali, Deputy Commissioner of Child Welfare Operations.

We are here today to respond to Resolution 180707 which calls for hearings to discuss lowering the threshold of reporting suspected child abuse and for Philadelphia to develop its own guidelines. The Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS) is licensed by the State Department of Human Services and is required to follow the state Child Protective Services Law which governs the reporting and investigation of child abuse reports. Philadelphia County cannot have its own guidelines. Only the state legislature can make changes.

Child abuse reporting requirements are set by state law in the Child Protective Services Law, 23 Pa. C.S.A. §6301 et seq., which clearly outlines what constitutes child abuse and who is a mandated reporter. Removal of children from their parents' care happens only by court order and is restricted to situations of "emergency removal because of imminent risk" and "clear necessity" under the Juvenile Act and well-established case law.

Our mandate is child safety. There is perhaps no other time in our nation's history that it has been more critical to listen to the children. Nearly 160 victims testified against the former U.S. Gymnastics' doctor, Nassar, sentenced to 175 years in jail. Closer to home, the recent PA Grand Jury report on allegations of sex abuse by more than 300 priests, with thousands of victims, is eye-opening and heart-wrenching.

**City of Philadelphia DHS**

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In our state, adults failed children victimized by Jerry Sandusky. The lessons learned from this tragedy helped to strengthen the state's child abuse reporting laws. It created clear pathways for medical practitioners to provide information to county child welfare agencies when abuse or neglect is suspected. It also expanded the role of school employees as mandated reporters.

Pennsylvania state laws reflect our shared value that this will not happen again. When abuse occurs in the home, it becomes even more important that we listen to the children in our lives. As a society, we have the opportunity to protect children, to change their life outcomes and to help parents create safe homes. As a community, we all play a part in keeping children safe.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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